

Local plants still among top polluters

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Columbia Falls' two largest industries once again found themselves on the list of the top 10 polluters in the state, as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week released its latest round of toxic chemical data.

Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. was fourth on the list, with total toxic emissions of 317,350 pounds in 1992. CFAC emissions were down from 1991, when 328,050 pounds were reported, but it wasn't enough to knock the aluminum company off the black list.

Hydrogen fluoride is in quantity the biggest pollutant emitted by CFAC. The company reported a total of 316,950 pounds released in 1992, but what the EPA report doesn't show is that during that same year the plant recycled back into the process 8.4 million pounds of hydrogen fluoride, said Lee Smith, vice president of external affairs for CFAC.

The 8.4 million pounds of recycled hydrogen fluoride equates to about 96 percent of the total amount generated, Smith added.

"In addition, the EPA report or prior press releases don't mention that the release of hydrogen fluoride is well within the state emission regulation of 2.6 pounds of fluoride per ton of aluminum produced," Smith said.

CFAC estimated that 100 pounds of cyanide compounds flowed into the river through groundwater seepage. A total of 77,600 pounds of cyanide compounds, found in the spent polliner, was shipped off-site for disposal in licensed hazardous waste facilities. Though the amount of cyanide released into the environment is only 0.12 percent of the amount treated off-site, the state has been working with CFAC to find a way to eliminate the cyanide seepage, and has ordered an impermeable cover be placed over the old landfill that's the source of the pollutant.

Smith noted that the company's total emission figures for 1992 add up to 319,550 pounds, 2,200 pounds more than the EPA's figures, and added he doesn't know how the discrepancy occurred.

Plum Creek Manufacturing came in number eight on the list, logging emissions of 110,500 pounds in 1992. Its total was up from the previous year, when 94,600 pounds of toxic chemicals were released into the

Please see Page 12

Pollution Continued from Page 1

atmosphere.

"We will be looking into different projects to reduce pollution," Plum Creek Environmental Engineer Mitchel Leu said. "We don't like to be on the list."

Plum Creek's medium-density fiberboard (MDF) plant in Columbia Falls is the primary culprit for emissions.

The largest amount of pollution comes from formaldehyde emissions,

Leu noted. A formaldehyde resin is used to bind the fibers together, and off-gases amounted to 77,000 pounds in 1992. The other toxic pollutant is ammonia, Leu said, which is injected into the fiberboard to counteract the leftover residuals from the formaldehyde. Ammonia emissions totaled 33,000 pounds during the last testing period.

Plum Creek emissions will be low-

er for the 1993 report, Leu said, because the company used its own stack tests that showed Plum Creek was emitting a lesser amount of toxic chemicals than they reported. For past reports the company had based its emissions on industry-wide averages, Leu added.

There's little proven technology for controlling fiberboard plant emissions, he noted.